

Reflecting on Sunday's Readings

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—August 1, 2021

Introduction: If you have ever tried feeding a toddler who does not know what they want to eat you know how difficult it is to satisfy an unidentified desire. Though they are offered numerous and diverse lunch choices they push them away with dissatisfaction. Usually the issue is not one of hunger for food but of a general attitude of dissatisfaction and hunger of spirit.

The crowds who followed Jesus evidenced a similar hunger of spirit. Like a child's question, "Mom, what is there to eat?" those who followed Jesus were also asking legitimate questions due to their spiritual hunger. But in a similar way to a child's boredom and rejection of the choices, these seekers of Jesus rejected and were unwilling to receive the Bread of Life which the Father put before them to satisfy their hunger. Though in this week's Gospel reading they responded, "Lord give us this bread always," by the end of the day they abandoned Jesus and the Bread of Life which the Father sent from heaven.

Dissatisfaction of spirit is often manifest in many different ways. Some people have an uneasy restlessness that seeks satisfaction for spiritual hunger in the pursuit of one thing after another. This spiritual hunger often drives people to pursue the latest toy, the latest philosophy, or the latest experience. Like a universal remote control, they are haphazardly flipping through the options of life but never able to settle on anything that fully satisfies their inner hunger. We would do well to heed Jesus' advice to them to reevaluate their lives and to not continue to expend their energies on things which do not satisfy.

Even as we cannot live without food, so the spirit of man cannot survive and thrive without the spiritual nourishment which is Jesus himself. In the subsequent three weeks the Gospel readings will explore John 6 and Jesus' discourse on the Bread of Life. We will read of the promise that by partaking of him we will receive real life. St. Thomas à Kempis said, "This most high and venerable Sacrament is the health of soul and body, the cure of every spiritual malady. By it our vices are cured, our passions restrained, temptations are lessened, grace is given in fuller measure, and virtue once established is fostered; faith is confirmed, hope is strengthened, and love kindled and deepened." * Jesus is the source of life and when he comes to us in the Eucharist, he comes to make a difference in us.

One difference we can expect to see in our life is that our hunger of spirit will be satisfied. However, we would be remiss if we over-looked the corresponding truth of this week's second reading. Jesus fully intends to reveal himself to us through sacred Scripture also. It is through the Scriptures that he brings about renewal of our mind, and enables us to know him; his values, his character, his nature, his truths in an intimate way, and so "learn Christ." It is this relationship of knowing him that removes the hunger of spirit.

In the coming weeks we will also hear afresh the invitation to believe and to receive him into our heart and life through the sacred Scriptures and in the Eucharist. We are invited to receive his Body and Blood as confirmation of our faith and commitment to follow him. St. Thomas à Kempis went on to say, "Blessed is the man who, whenever he celebrates the Eucharist or receives Communion, offers himself to Our Lord as a living sacrifice." *

In the coming weeks we will learn both the right and the wrong way to respond to Jesus and the truth that he is the Bread of Life sent from the Father. How, in the future, will we respond to this

invitation? May God help us to do so with an *active* faith which enables us to continually offer ourselves to him as a living sacrifice.

*Thomas a Kempis, from *The Imitation of Christ*, the Fourth Book (On the Blessed Sacrament) Chapters 4 & 10.

First Reading — Ex 16:2-4, 12-15

The whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “Would that we had died at the LORD’s hand in the land of Egypt, as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread! But you had to lead us into this desert to make the whole community die of famine!”

Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will now rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion; thus will I test them, to see whether they follow my instructions or not.

“I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them: In the evening twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread, so that you may know that I, the LORD, am your God.”

In the evening quail came up and covered the camp. In the morning a dew lay all about the camp, and when the dew evaporated, there on the surface of the desert were fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground. On seeing it, the Israelites asked one another, “What is this?” for they did not know what it was. But Moses told them, “This is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.”

1. How can we “gather a portion every day” of the nourishment God has provided for us?

Responsorial Reading — Ps 78:3-4, 23-24, 25, 54

Second Reading — Eph 4:17, 20-24

Brothers and sisters: I declare and testify in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; that is not how you learned Christ, assuming that you have heard of him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus, that you should put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth.

2. What analogies would you use to describe the process of “Put off..., be renewed..., and put on...?”

3. Where are you in this process?

Gospel Reading — Jn 6:24-35

When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. And when they found him across the sea they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” Jesus answered them and said, “Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal.” So they said to him, “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent.” So they said to him, “What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat.” So Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

So they said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.”

4. Describe what Jesus meant by “the food which perishes”?

5. Jesus uses the words “labor for” and “work of God.” How much effort do you think we need to invest to cultivate our faith in God?